

Never Take My Heart

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Summary

The story of Philza Minecraft is a long one, full of fighting and adventure and more than a little bit of luck.

Unfortunately, neither Sapnap nor George were listening during that lesson.

(Or, over a span of a few hundred years, Philza Minecraft survives, nearly dies, becomes a simp, starts an empire, ends an empire and becomes a father.)

Notes

hello hello hello!!!!

If you are new, welcome to scarecrow au! You don't have to read the previous part, When The Sunlight Dies, but if you would like too... *waggles eyebrows*

Anyway, for those that aren't, here is our sbi backstory - we ended up writing it afterall!

As always, a huge huge thank you to Jess, for beta'ing and putting up with our shennanigans!

Finally, if u like scarecrow au, come poke us on our socials ([here](#) [here](#) [here](#), [and here!](#))

Or join our discord where we talk about the fic, drop behind the scenes andd ping you when we start working on that sequel..... eventually..... (https://discord.gg/utC7c4PdeE)

Now, please enjoy!!!

Philza was mortal, once.

What makes mortality? Whatever it is, Phil learns it at too young an age. He is born into a small family that quickly dwindles down until he is the last one standing. Alone, in a world so large, so vast, Phil knows that he is mortal and knows that to be mortal is to *do* until death. Phil would like to do it all before he meets that embrace.

He is charming and clever, ambitious and adventurous. It's sad, being alone, but he is *alive* and that is more than the rest of his family can say.

He grieves because to grieve is to be mortal, too. But he also explores. He travels far and wide. There are no cities, no countries; perhaps, if the wind blows fortuitously, he may happen upon the occasional village. Some are larger than others, but none exceed a simple plot of land with a few houses and some friendly faces. Few are like Phil.

The world is new; a babe in and of itself, perhaps of an equitable age to himself the first time he strikes out on his own. It breathes magic, and mortality is so, so fragile in the face of that. The villagers know it as well as Phil does, though they fear it in ways he does not.

The veil between worlds is thin, when he is young and before the other realms call their children home. Endermen roam and Ghast haunt the skies, as common as shooting stars. Phil is not the first determined to find the sources of the magic of the world, but he is the first to succeed.

Careful study - and much less careful trial and error - lead him to enderpearls; a rare prize obtained when slain Endermen disappear in a flash of purple particles and accompanying screams that haunt him for days after each kill. The enderpearls led him to the Nether.

When Phil is older, he will be able to tell stories of his travels and smile about nearly every one. It is the story of the Nether that he can't smile through.

The Nether is a hell unlike anything Phil has ever or *will* ever face again. It is hot and sulfuric. There are structures made of red stone that tower so high he can't see the tops, and they're teeming with danger. The screams of piglin, the vicious squealing of hoglin, the shrieks of ghasts - they're unlike even the death cries of an Enderman, almost unable to be captured by words for all their horror. The slice of an arrow that withers his leg for days until he happens upon the components for a potion of restoration. Crackling skeletons and silent, burning demons that float high above him and rain down fire. Blistering magma and sand that drags him to near crawling, the sort of fear that only comes when mortals must face their mortality head on and *pray* that it is not the end.

He does not know how long he spends in the Nether, but he spends long enough to know there are forces there that watch him for fun, that laugh at him as he struggles, that drop potion ingredients for good performances. Who gives him teasing hints about other adventures he might have, if he can survive, only to spawn those unhinged, gray skeletons around the next corner.

However long he spends there, he isn't sure, and he only escapes by chance. There is a portal, much like the one he made when he first came to the Nether, made of obsidian. He isn't meant to find it, he thinks, but he does, and he leaves. He ends up in a birch forest and doesn't look back when he runs. He promises himself as he flees that he'll never return to that realm, not for anything.

There are cities, when he returns to the world. They're powerful, with newly carved brick and freshly mined fortunes. The villagers have become numerous. Mortality is not what it once was. Phil feels so very mortal, standing in front of it all.

It's the first time that he realizes that not having a home to return to goes both ways. He's been free since he was practically a child, no one to answer to and no one to disappoint. But now, hurting and weak and with nothing to show for it but some blaze rods and the skulls of gray skeletons, he has to come to terms with the knowledge that there is not a single person in the entire world that he'd traveled that had missed him for even a second that he'd been gone.

He recovers in a city which built itself in the cold. He comes to like it, the extreme difference from the Nether, and how the people are firm, straightforward, and caring. It takes months but he does heal, and the urge to keep exploring, to see if the gifts of knowledge the Nether beings gave him were true, pulls him from the city.

When Phil escaped, it was with nothing but a chest of blaze rods and wither skulls. His experimentations with the blaze powder he collected are slow and careful; he has a finite amount of it and he won't go back for more, not even to appease his curiosity. Slow as it is, though, he finds the Eyes soon enough. The powder and an enderpearl create something... more. When looks into it, he *sees*. He sees what he must do.

He travels out of the city, to a forest biome with not another soul for miles. He hurls the Eye as hard as he can. He follows it, just as he saw himself do.

He finds the stronghold, eventually. It is a remnant of something far, far too old for his understanding. It echoes the fortresses and bastions he saw in the Nether, but some parts of it ring different.

The Nether was suffocating for its vastness; neverending heat and netherrack and vines that crept ever-closer when he wasn't looking. In contrast, the End, when he falls through the portal and into the emptiness and white stone, is...

A void, perhaps. Space. Phil has often been struck wordless in his quests but never so much as when he picks himself up and sees nothing but endless, endless gray emptiness and stark white.

And when he sees her...

It is a secret between the two of them, Phil the mortal and *her*, what passes between them there, at the end of everything. He will never tell another soul, not even their son. But whatever it is, he is laden with new knowledge for it. He is invited into the court of the Other Side and recognizes her as its Queen.

She gives him this knowledge freely; knowledge of her and her court; of his true luck in the Nether and the fate he only barely escaped; of the beings called Vex which belong to the Inbetween, who watched him struggle and played with his fate for fun; of the beings called Allay who would perhaps do very much the same to him in the End, were it not for her. Mortals are sometimes too fun to resist, for beings like those who populate the courts.

Unlike the Nether, Phil does not want to leave. If he could spend the rest of his life in this emptiness, under her wings, in her shadows, basking in *her*, he would. But the End is not meant for mortals. It is not meant for the likes of him.

He does not know how long he is able to stay, but he knows that he is very weak when she touches the pool at the base of her throne and it turns the same purple as her eyes, as the eyes of her Endermen. She kisses him, just once, before she passes him through the not-water of the pool. A promise. A vow, which he returns at the altar by which she sends him away.

When Phil once again returns to the world of his birth, time has passed just as it had when he was in the Nether. No longer simply cities, but entire nations have formed. Wars have been fought. Lives have been lost. The magic of the world has faded, just a little, as the veil between the planes thickened. Many citizens of the Nether and the End were called home. It is only in the liminal spaces that it still thrives - the great Crimson Forest that leaks Nether and allows Vex and their brethren to access the Overworld, the strongholds buried deep that allows Allay and their ilk passage. What is left is their children, humans with the blood of the Vex and Allay no longer sanctioned to stroll about as they once could, with magic saturating less of the world.

Phil is not faded. The kiss grants more than affection, though he gladly would have taken nothing but that alone. When he returns, it is with more, but also less.

More: a pair of wings, nearly the color of the Queen's own, the color of her endless gray void-space; an onyx egg sparkling with her promise; the immense, enduring love of a patroness that was there at the beginning of it all and is there at the end; a wife.

Less: his mortality.

His wife has never pledged her love to one so mortal. Her lips to his is her love for him, and that love gives but that love also takes and though it is a price he gladly pays, it is still a price. The Queen of the End and of the Other Side has never loved a mortal, and that must remain true, and so Phil is no longer mortal.

The loss of his mortality is...jarring. Phil knows it in his bones, in every step, in the air that fills his lungs, that he is no longer of the world he walks, just as he is not of the End. He has a title, her Angel of Death who does her will, and a patroness, and a love like no one else will perhaps ever have, and he walks the world with the gravity of it all. But he has lost the chance to ever join his family in the place where they passed and he has lost the chance to ever be as he once was.

Immortality is a fickle thing, and it is not for Phil. He is not immortal, he knows. But neither is he mortal. He is something other, hinging entirely on his wife and her devotion to keeping him alive. Perhaps she is the bringer of death, or perhaps the bringer of life, or perhaps she

shares this power with the Empress who rules the Inbetween. In the end, does it matter? He is her's, fully and wholly, and gladly.

Still, Phil is lonely. He loves his wife, but they are separated by entire planes and she is a busy woman, with a court to rule. He is alone when she is gone and she is gone often. Sometimes, when the night is true and the moon bright, she can manifest as a shadow over his shoulder, a brush of lips against his as a breeze passes by. She is always with him, with the crows that flock to his side and the prayers he offers at every dusk, but he cannot hold her as he wants to.

His first stay within the End was too long. His not-immortal existence cannot exist within its limits; it destabilizes him. Had he known then that such a long stay would shorten each of his next visits, he isn't sure that he would have left earlier, but he would have appreciated every second more. It takes practice, and many close calls, but Phil is a hard study and he works out that he can visit the End once every seven years. His body will only hold out for a short period of time before the immortal nature of the realm grates at his core and it shortens - first a few months, and then only a month, and then three weeks, and then two. There will reach a point, he knows, when he will not even last minutes. That is when he knows that his wife will call him home.

Until then, though, he enjoys being alive and he knows that she enjoys watching him live his mortal-immortal life. She won't ask him to give it up to join her until the second that the threat of being separated forever is too much for the both of them to bear.

It is a long existence. He has been alive longer than any other mortal in the entire world. He has seen every part of the world, some places more than once. He has met people - so, so many people. He has watched them grow old and die. He has met their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren. He has watched them die, too. He tries everything; he watches war and he fights in it. He watches peace treated and he advocates for it. He watches treaties broken and more war break out and knows he can do better.

Phil is hundreds of years old and well-known for it when he decides that he wants to try to do better. He wants to make something that might last as long as he will, perhaps. He takes what influence he has (some), and the power that he contains (much) and he carves out something in the brittle cold of the north where he once took shelter after his escape from the Nether.

The Antarctic Empire flourishes under his rule. He has countless centuries of hard-won wisdom under his belt, but this endeavor is the first to bring back his smile like mischief. He feels like the cocky human that first entered the End once again.

More than that, he comes to care so deeply for his people. He loves them like children, even as every death breaks his heart a little more. He fights when he must, causes chaos when he can, and settles into ruling like it's an old habit.

He is sought out; first for his swords and then for his words. He talks and the world often listens, though sometimes it does not. Such is its way, and if it was any other then Phil would not love it as he does.

It is fun. Phil enjoys it, for all that it can be stressful. Mostly, though, it is lonely. Phil is still so alone.

And then, one day, he is not. Nearly a year after his last visit to the End, during his dusk prayers, there is a murder of crows that caw and scream at him until he follows them to the deepest shadows of his room, where he feels the brush of fingers against his cheeks and hears the *poof* of an escaping enderman and -

And there is a *baby* and Phil knows his name is Wilbur as soon as his eyes find him.

Wilbur is -

Wilbur is Wilbur. If there is one thing in the entirety of existence that comes close to his love for his wife, it's his love for their son.

Wilbur takes after his mother, all the bearings of a prince born for it rather than self-tasked with it as his father had been. He is charismatic and cheeky, he likes to play and he is sly - more so than Phil can handle some days. He likes to laugh, and he likes to learn even more. He spends so much time in Phil's arms as a baby that he is upset about learning to walk and it breaks Phil's heart to watch him whine and cry. His excited, babbling laughter when he learns to run both excites and terrifies Phil. He sleeps best in the shadows, where his mother can coo him to sleep, and Phil is...

Finally, Phil is not alone.

No different from her hand in marriage, this gift is not without it's own price. Phil has something precious now, someone he must protect. It's terrible and awesome in the truest meaning of the word.

Wilbur is a prince and when he is announced the whole Empire celebrates. At the start, Phil is thankful for the tall walls and the guards who live and breathe loyalty to him and their country's patroness. But as Wilbur grows, dressed in the royal blue and with a circlet sat heavy on his head, Phil's opinions change.

He's lived a long life. He knows just how this world treats its princes. Already other kingdoms creep closer to his, hoping to sink their hooks into his boy by way of betrothal or chivalric oath. His child is a target, merely because of the blood in his veins and the colours of his clothes.

Phil had wanted something that lasted, that would be with him until he joined his wife in the End. But nothing - none of his ambition, none of his hopes or his accomplishments as Emperor mean anything compared to the love he has for his son. None of it compares to the lengths he would go to for his son. In the end, it is an easy decision.

Wilbur is barely five years old when Phil officially abdicates the throne and disbands the Antarctic Empire for good. He spends two weeks pulling all his political prowess to allow his citizens to find new homes, to guide them in brighter and warmer directions than the Antarctic chill, or settle in those who will not leave. And then he takes his son and some supplies and he leaves.

Once, Phil ruled an empire. It was vast and powerful, and so was he. Phil was an emperor and now he is not. He is something far, far more important. He is a father, and he bundles Wilbur up, and takes flight to the stronghold. It is time for Wilbur to meet his mother properly, though it is two years too early for Phil to return.

Phil sends Wilbur through the portal and he is alone again. He spends nearly four months underground, patrolling the stronghold, fixing it up, while he waits for his wife to have her time with their son.

Despite his origins, Wilbur cannot stay in the End for long. He is only as immortal as his father, though the realm is in his blood and that protects him from the illness that often takes over Phil toward the end of his visit. He is returned to Phil looking pale and flagged but immensely pleased to see his father again and full of stories of his mother and the court he may one day lead, the Other Side.

Phil wants to hear them all.

Parenting on the road is very different to parenting in an empire. It has very different challenges, but they are free, *Wilbur* is free. They travel, far and wide, and Phil sees the world anew through Wilbur's wide, exploring eyes. They return to the stronghold in two year's time to visit his wife, and then return to their journey, a pattern Phil will repeat for the rest of his life.

People still seek out his wisdom, his diplomacy. He still has a reputation that precedes him, and it means that in a span of seven years, they have travelled more than any one person normally does in a lifetime. He hopes he's doing a good job, making his wife proud, in the ramshackle life he provides for his son. He never goes hungry, never wants for anything. He is a happy child, with his father's kind heart and with all the stubbornness of his mother. As long as he is happy, Phil is too.

He thinks he does a good job of it until one day he comes home to a random, young piglin-hybrid in their temporary residence. That is the day that, despite it all, he *knows* he did well.

Wilbur is thirteen and very aggressive about his independence when he finds Technoblade.

He's walking in the woods, muttering to himself about his father not giving him enough *space*, with both eyes on a particularly nice looking beehive practically dripping with honey that he wants a taste of and no eyes at all on the tall grass in front of him. He doesn't *mean* to step on any bodies that day, but one second he is standing, and the next he is in the dirt with grass poking at his eyes and nose and there is a low, terrible moan of pain coming from whatever lump his legs are splayed over.

The lump, it turns out, is a person. A boy, maybe Wilbur's age; all Wilbur sees is *pink* at first. A piglin, Wilbur thinks, until the body turns and Wilbur readjusts. A piglin-hybrid. Long, bubblegum pink hair, tinged pink skin, a human face just learning toward the broad features of the piglin, tiny tusks peeking from an open mouth stained red. There's blood. There's so much blood, two arrows sticking out of the boy like he's a pincushion and more wounds than Wilbur can count marring his skin.

Wilbur doesn't think about it too hard. The honey is forgotten. He slings the boy across his back, tries his best to get his hands under his thighs to piggy-back him (no pun intended) but ends up mostly just dragging him even despite how tall Wilbur is. He isn't sure if his dad will help; he isn't keen on strangers and he's always had a disinclination to those connected to the Nether, so Wilbur watches carefully until he sees his dad leave the house to go putter around in the gardens out back and then he drags his newly found friend to his room and prays to his mother.

She answers. She answers every time that Wilbur prays but this is especially important and so she answers especially fast. Under her guidance, Wilbur collects a bowl of water and a few towels, and bandages and the paste Phil keeps around for when Wilbur scrapes his knees. He isn't sure it will be enough but his mom says it will suffice and he has faith in her. He can feel her hesitance, that the prince of her court is helping kin of the Inbetween, even a cast-away, but she directs him when he asks anyway.

He removes the arrows - by his mother's grace, they were more embedded in clothes than skin and the wounds are not deep. Wilbur wipes clean what he can with the towels and water, slathers nearly the entire jar of paste over every wound he can find after he strips the torn leather and scraps of cloth from the boy and tucks him in in his own bed.

His mother promises the boy will make it but only if Wilbur cares for him, so Wilbur sneaks downstairs once he's cleaned up and tells Phil he isn't feeling well. He toasts the entire loaf of bread in the kitchen to take upstairs to "settle his stomach."

The boy wakes up the next morning, foggy and confused and feverish, and he does not eat when Wilbur pushes the cold toast on him. They argue, instead. The boy says Wilbur has kidnapped him, Wilbur says that he *saved* him and he did so on orders of his patroness. He does not mention that she is his mother, nor that she did not actually even want him to save this piglin-boy in particular.

The boy is not friendly. He is cold and rude. Wilbur finds it very funny and eventually annoys the boy into eating every piece of toast and drinking mug after mug of water. He annoys a name out of him, too. Technoblade. Technoblade has a bad fever, which is worrying, but Wilbur thinks he can fix it.

Unfortunately for Wilbur, he told his father that he was sick the night before. When Phil comes to check on him, he peeks the door open so as to not disturb his resting child, and instead finds a completely *new* child covered in bandages sitting in his son's bed while his son sits on the floor and pokes at him.

"Wilbur *Soot* Minecraft," he says firmly, making them both jump. He feels bad about it, because Wilbur wheels around looking as if he's ready to spout the biggest lie of his life, while the boy in the bed looks as if he is ready to *fight*. "Who the fuck is this?"

"Wow." Wilbur says immediately and with not a single ounce of insincerity in his voice. "Wow, dad. How could you forget my brother, Technoblade?"

"What?" Phil asks, confused enough that it trumps the previous confusion.

“What?” Technoblade asks, confused enough that it trumps the previous fighting instinct.

“I think I’d know if I had another son, Wil.”

“Don’t take this too far, human!” Techno warns and then has to lay back down because he is feverish and all the excitement of eating and drinking and giving out his *name* and being discovered and being accused of being this random dude’s brother and this random man’s son is a little too much for his state of health.

“No.” Wilbur says firmly. “This is my twin brother, Technoblade, and he is and has been living with us forever. Stop being mean to your son, it’s rude, and I’ll tell Mum you’re playing stupid pranks on us again!”

“I -”

“I told you he was sick last night,” Wilbur says over him, “I think we should focus on getting him better rather than joking around, Dad.”

“Sick?” Phil zeroes in, finally noticing the paleness of the stranger boy’s skin, the red-tinged towels in the corner, the slathered paste and messy bandages that covers him. “Wilbur, why didn’t you say anything!?”

And suddenly, Technoblade is part of the family. He is Wilbur’s age, or maybe younger, or maybe older. He doesn’t know, and neither does Wilbur, and Phil doesn’t care.

Technoblade is no longer a part of the piglin clan that rejected him, he is a part of the Minecraft household. Wilbur never stops calling Technoblade his twin brother, first a panicked lie and then a joke and then a universal truth that Wilbur simply won’t let go of, and Techno eventually stops trying to make him. Wilbur, a prince to another realm’s court, and Techno, a warrior hailing from a heritage that does not want him. They fight like brothers, both alongside and against each other. At the end of the day, they still eat dinner at the same table.

Techno doesn't see Phil as a father. Phil, to him, is a guardian and a confidant, an older friend who is wise and good and who Techno comes to trust as time passes and days turn to years together. This new family that found him, took him in, accepted him - Techno loves them, as it comes to be.

And Phil, once again, is given a new person to protect. A person who is in a way similar to Wilbur, but also different. Technoblade does not need physical protection as much, but he is an abandoned child, an unwanted child, and Phil will never let stand the idea that Techno deserved that. He is wanted by them, and was perhaps fated to be with them.

Phil travels, still, and he takes Wilbur and Techno with him even as they become adults and find interests outside of their family. He gave up his empire many years ago but the respect he receives as an angel of his patroness means he is oftentimes an honored guest in every country, in most political spheres, especially those that are in need of help. Wilbur tags along

because he loves to learn; Techno tags along because despite his spousehood, Phil is technically still very soft and squishy and has a knack, much like his son, of finding trouble.

It's on one of these journeys that they find Tommy in the streets of a defunct nation.

L'Manburg is Wilbur's favorite subject to study and becomes his biggest disappointment. The citizens are cold and broken, the streets empty. The newly-elected president ran before his term had even been up, the council left scattered and directionless in his wake now that the country had begun to fail. It was too late by the time Phil arrived to do much more than talk to what was left of the council, advising them to find another nation to take their small citizenship.

"Let's go, boys." Phil sighs when his offers of aid are rebuffed and they find themselves kicked from the courthouse. "There's nothing to be done here."

But Wilbur wants to explore the streets and there is not much of a schedule when you're Phil, so he says okay and his boys wander while he stays to attempt to reason one last time with the leadership.

And it's there that Wilbur and Technoblade meet Tommy, who appears just as they both round a corner. He's a tall wisp of a child with two sticks and a bruised face, and an interest in whatever is in Techno's bag because it smells delicious and he's starving.

"Give me the bag and I'll let you live." The street child says threateningly, pointing a stick at each of them. "No one has to get hurt here, gents. Just lookin' for a bite to eat, no need to make this bloody."

"Techno, give him the bag." Wilbur frowns at Techno as if it's Techno's fault for not being faster about surrendering his items.

"He can have the food in the bag." Techno compromises magnanimously and pulls out the freshly baked bread they'd bought for lunch from the only functioning bakery in town.

"Oh, that was easy." The boy cautiously lowers his sticks, "You'll just give it to me, then?"

"Of course. You look hungry." Wilbur takes the bread and offers it.

"I sure the fuck am," the boy says and snatches the bread as soon as it's within grasp. He stuffs half in his mouth in one bite and it puffs his cheeks out like a squirrel, too much for a single bite. Tears shine in his eyes as he chews savagely and swallows too early, then stuffs the second half in his mouth in much the same way. As he chews, he wipes his hands on his dirty shorts.

"When's the last time you ate, kid?" Wilbur asks casually, "You look a little young to be holding strangers up for their bread."

"No such thing as too young in L'Manburg!" The boy knocks against his chest once he's swallowed the second half, coughing roughly. "Say, you got any more in that mystery bag, big man? I'll admit it, I'm still a little peckish."

“How about you take us back to the bakery and we can get more?” Wilbur offers.

The boy’s brow furrows. “You want to buy me bread?”

“Sure.” Wilbur shrugs. “I want to know more about this place. You seem knowledgeable enough.”

“Oh, so it’s payment?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“Sounds like a good deal to me,” the boy offers his hand, “The name’s Tommy, at your service.”

“Wilbur.” Wilbur shakes his hand, “And my brother, Techno.”

Tommy leads them back to the bakery and walks in with all the smugness of a man chased out many times before.

“Now I told you, kid,” The baker puts her hands to her hips, “I can’t afford to give you anymore of my goods. How many times do I have to say it?”

“Don’t get your britches bunched, lady, I’m paying!”

“With what money?” the baker scoffs.

“Ours.” Wilbur loops an arm around Tommy’s shoulders. “Tommy, go ahead and pick out what you want. We’ll pay.”

The baker gives them a suspicious look but goes to the window as Tommy practically hops over.

“Don’t even think about it.” Techno says from Wilbur’s side as they watch Tommy point at at least four different baked goods through the window, chattering away.

“Think about what?” Wilbur replies unconvincingly.

“You can’t save everybody, Wil.” Techno says without looking at him.

“Sure, I can’t.” Wilbur shrugs. “Two isn’t everybody.”

“*Phil* can’t save everybody, either.”

“What do you mean?” Wilbur smiles. “Of course he can. He’s Philza Minecraft.”

Technoblade sighs and goes to pay for practically everything in the window while Wilbur takes a seat.

They talk to Tommy about the country and, slowly, they talk to Tommy about himself, too.

What it comes down to, in the end, is that Tommy is all alone in the world and Wilbur doesn't like that at all and Wilbur has never not gotten what he wanted in his life.

"Okay," Wilbur says, "We can go."

Phil blinks as he looks first at Technoblade, and then Wilbur, and then Tommy, in descending order of height. "Who is this?"

"Philza Minecraft," Wilbur frowns at him. "Those jokes aren't on. *Please* stop forgetting your own children, it's insulting and cruel. Tommy, ignore our father, he thinks he's funny."

"*What?*"

"Yeah, Phil." Technoblade says blandly, having given in sometime around when he found out how long it's been since Tommy's last meal, "This is our brother, Tommy."

"Yes, Mr. Philza, sir. I'm your son." Tommy says seriously, blinking up at Phil with those baby blues of his. A crow caws loudly in a nearby tree, staring Phil down when he looks at it.

"I..." Phil rubs his face and then turns to Techno. "If I take all of my children out of this nation, will there be angry people left behind?"

"No." Techno says and that's enough for Phil.

"Okay." Phil says loudly. "Okay. Sorry for the tasteless joke, Tommy. My son. *Fuck.*"

"*Fuck.*" Tommy repeats seriously and takes another bite of the sandwich in his hands. He has five more nested neatly in the bag at Techno's side. He'll have eaten them all by nightfall of that day and will happily ask for dinner, too.

And so Phil has two sons and a dearly beloved ward, and his wife, who comes to visit when she can and reigns adoration on her three children with impunity.

Phil, who was alone for much, much too long, is grateful for them. He loves them, his boys. He thinks that his family is complete with Tommy, little gremlin though he may be. They continue to travel for nearly a year, staying in some capitol or another, wandering the earth, eating food and laughing. Techno disappears sometimes to go do Technoblade things and Wilbur grows ever more interested in politics, in participating on his own, and Tommy is just happy to be there, with them.

Phil isn't lonely anymore.

They're in Snowchester the next year when Phil's family is *actually* completed.

He's been summoned, unfortunately, to mediate the nation of Snowchester and a subset of the Badlands, which is more a loose territory of quasi-friendly states mildly governed by a council of representatives within Pandora, the capitol city. This particular state is close to war

with Snowchester and neither side *wants* a war, but it's a political disaster and if something isn't done, then war will be what follows. Phil has doubts that it will simply stay between the two of them. Snowchester is not an unconnected country and the Badlands may hate each other but they hate the outside world more and the council will band together on this. A lot of people will die if this isn't resolved.

When Phil is brought in, his three boys tagging along, the situation is as follows:

The Queen's third wife, mother of her fifth heir, promised her prince-child's hand to a family of the Badlands in order to give her child power and unite a hardy chunk of land along the shared border of the two nations. Unfortunately for the Queen's third wife, the Badlands family she dealt with was promised a prince, not a boy with royal blood six tragedies from the throne.

Tubbo's siblings are more advantageously placed within the hierarchy, two by the first wife and one by the second wife and two by the first husband, all older and more well established with their parents backing them in court. Tubbo may one day have a chance, but until he is older, he is the unfavored choice and the throne is out of his young grasp. Not that he particularly wants it, but no one ever cares to ask for his opinion anyway.

Despite this, the Queen cannot allow any of her brood to be disrespected. She is demanding one of the Badlands families produce a suitable suitor for her son but the only ones willing are of an Enderman bloodline. Snowchester is deeply suspicious of the End's ilk and has rejected the suitor, enraging the Badlands.

It's not an easy fix, especially for people who aren't Phil. He eventually settles the matter by simply offering to mentor both. An unfavored prince and a nobleman of ill-trusted blood are one thing, but to be mentored by Philza Minecraft, Angel of Death, would be a status that superseded quite a few others. Tubbo might even become more favored than his elder siblings if he is accepted into Phil's ranks - with that boost to his name and the proper skills, he could be the one left standing amongst his siblings for the throne. Ranboo, the Enderman child, would become more than a simple nobleman - not only a first husband to the boy who may one day rule Snowchester, but also a ward of Phil; it would elevate him to just under the council within Pandora's borders.

Phil, more than anything else, would simply like to remove these children from this awful situation, for as long as possible.

Besides, Tommy runs into Tubbo and they become fast friends while Phil and his family have stationed themselves within the court. Tommy doesn't have any friends his age and they're thick as thieves before anyone can say a word against it; and Tubbo has a tight grip on Ranboo, who is shy and quiet and timid but ultimately just as attached to Tubbo as Tubbo is to him. Whether they're attached or not, politics has little care for the feelings of kids born into stations of class.

It's Tommy, actually, who gives Phil the idea that he ends up offering to the Queen and the Badlands.

Phil is sitting in the library of the Snowchester royal palace, late at night, when Tommy comes in, dragging Tubbo, who is dragging Ranboo, right behind him. All look tired and upset with red-rimmed eyes. Tommy, at least, is determined, which both eases Phil's concern and makes him nervous.

"Hello, boys." he says, hiding a yawn with a fist. He's been reading betrothal laws for hours by this point and was planning on going to sleep on the books for the third night in a row at this rate.

"Hello, Phil. We should leave tonight."

"What?"

"I *said*." Tommy glowers. "We should leave Snowchester tonight, the lot of us. Fuck this politics shit."

"Tommy, we can't just leave. And we definitely can't leave with the princes."

"I don't know any princes." Tommy says mutinously.

"Oh?" Phil can't help but smile. "Then who's behind you, kid?"

Tommy takes a deep breath. "Stop joking, Phil. You know it's mean to joke about forgetting your kids."

"My kids?" Phil says, lips twitching. Tommy really has taken after Wil too much. He isn't as smooth with the lies, or as confident that they'll work, but *really*.

"Yes. Your son, Tubbo, and your other son, Ranboo. He's the least favorite, but we don't tell him that."

"Hello, father." Tubbo says shakily and it both breaks and warms Phil's heart.

"Do I have to call you dad?" Ranboo asks curiously, sniffing, and Phil chokes on a laugh.

"No, Ranboo." Phil says, sitting back. "You don't have to. I think I have an idea that will fix this that doesn't have to technically end in adoption or running away."

"Good." Ranboo smiles shyly and Phil smiles back.

And that is how Phil finds himself with three wards and two sons in the span of a little over two decades. Two decades feels like only a drop in the bucket of his lifetime but it's the most eventful two decades he's ever experienced. His wife laughs at him every night, when he prays to her, sounding like the cawing of crows. Phil deserves it.

The next few years are interesting. Phil loves the first one most of all, just after he takes Tubbo and Ranboo away. That year, he and his boys just - adventure together. They wander, they eat, they laugh. They camp out and meet new people. They make risky plays and they

save each other and his wife, their patroness, makes thunder boom above them to show her own approval. The rain tends to avoid them when Ranboo is uncovered. Phil feels her love and approval at all times.

Things can't last forever, though. It's a painful truth of mortality; one that not even Phil's not-immortality can fix.

Wilbur says he wants to go out on his own, and Technoblade admits over the fire that he's feeling the urge to travel, too, on his own, for a little bit. They're grown, they're *men* now, and though Phil has had the pleasure of being with them for so long, he can't have expected them to stay with him forever (he did, though, didn't he?).

Despite his true desires, Phil wishes them both well and sends them off. To Technoblade, he gifts a compass that will always bring him back to Phil. To Wilbur, he gives him an onyx egg sparkling with the promises of his mother.

Both set off - Wilbur goes east, toward the rising sun, and Techno goes west, where it will set that night. Phil watches them both, gripping Tommy's hand so hard he worries later that he's hurt him, until they disappear into the horizon.

He spends the next year with his youngest three; it's a challenge and he misses his oldest two so much some days that he can barely breathe from it, but he also has fun. Tommy is so innately empathetic and wants to *help* so badly that Phil simply can't be too down. Tubbo is loud and excitable and somehow risky and cautious all at once. Ranboo is shy until he's comfortable, and then he rambles and lopes his gangly limbs all the fuck over.

Wilbur writes weekly about his travels; he's settled into Kinoko Kingdom within three months - which Phil isn't very pleased about, but he knows who his son is - and is slowly rising in the political ranks. Technoblade doesn't write but he unerringly finds them every few months and drops in, spends a week or two traveling with them before he leaves again. Each time, he teaches the boys something new to go along with Phil's own training. Phil takes his little trio along on his political mediations, does his best to show them the ropes, teach them all at least something during their time with him.

Eventually, Wilbur invites him to visit Kinoko and Technoblade tags along. They meet the prince, a boy the same age as Wilbur, and the Queen and her Prince Consort. Phil is welcomed as an honored guest, an advisor to a queen wrapped in a sort of magic that stinks of a realm Phil swore he'd never go near again. He keeps his brood from the throne room and warns Wilbur that not all is as it may appear.

"I know, dad." Wilbur assures him and Phil has a bad feeling that his daring, brilliant, beautiful boy is perhaps not being as honest in his letters as Phil would have hoped.

But it is Wilbur's life and Phil leaves him to it. He lets the boys run the castle, climb the prince and his guards, make friends, be children. He advises when his opinion is solicited, he enjoys the beautiful country. He leaves within two weeks, after making sure Wilbur still has his gift.

The next year, they visit again and things are...different, under the surface.

“I know what I’m doing.” Wilbur snaps at one point, when Phil pushes.

“No doubt, mate, no doubt.” Phil tries to soothe. “I just...I worry.”

“Well, don’t. I’m not a child anymore, Phil. I’ve built something here. Something that is going to be incredible. Beautiful, even. I know what I’m doing.” Wilbur repeats.

Phil doesn’t think he does, but what can he do? Still, when Tommy and Tubbo and Ranboo ask if they can stay in Kinoko, just for a little while, Phil says no. Maybe next time.

They leave.

The next time they visit Kinoko, it is after a coup has murdered the reigning monarchs and disappeared the only prince.

“What have you done?” Phil asks, staring at a man that looks and sounds like his son, but who Phil isn’t sure he recognizes anymore.

“You wouldn’t understand.” Wilbur says and turns away from him.

Phil can’t leave. He watches it all; Eret crowned the new monarch. Eret losing his mind to the crown. A farce of an election.

It’s during the election that Phil meets Quackity. Phil watches Wilbur watch Quackity and aches for the pain that he knows he can’t save his son from. He wonders if that was how his wife looked at him, if that sort of devotion runs in End blood.

Quackity joins their ranks soon after Phil calls Techno to Kinoko. He infiltrates their family easy as can be; Wilbur lets him in and just as Phil has never turned away someone brought to him by his children, he doesn’t turn Quackity away either. Instead, he watches.

Quackity has dark eyes - physically speaking, only one is dark, but Phil recognizes the look. He’s seen it in so many in the past; a desperate, gnawing hunger for something. A sharp will to survive that not many would win against. It isn’t hard for Phil to guess Quackity’s true intentions, nor the puppet master behind them, but he doesn’t try to talk Wilbur down. He knows he can’t. He’s spoiled his children, unfortunately, and Wilbur is not used to being told no.

Wilbur is a prince twice over. His first loyalty is to the Other Side; he’s only been to the End a few times but when he is there, he is the beloved prince of a court - dangerous and beautiful in equal measure, and *meant* to be his one day. His second, though, is to the Antarctic Empire. His unfinished symphony; if only he’d been born a few decades sooner, he would have perhaps been gifted the crown when Phil grew bored of ruling.

Wilbur doesn’t resent the way he grew up, nor the way his parents chose to raise him. He’s learned lessons as a wanderer that he never would have learned as a prince - but balance is important. In gaining those lessons, he lost out on what other princes had. What George had,

for instance; an education focused on ruling, an entire childhood in a grand castle, with people who *listened* to him. Respected what he said.

Wilbur wants more than a simple wanderer's life. He wants to rule, as was his twice-birthright. And the Other Side will be covered by his mum for eons longer yet. In this life, in his mortality, he's had only the empire and he lost it before he was even old enough to cement the feeling of the circlet to memory.

He'd thought L'Manburg would be his second chance; a country on the brink. He'd been too late, though. By the time he'd reached it, it had already been tipped over the edge.

Kinoko... Kinoko is his real chance. His chance to have power in this world, to be *someone* outside of just Philza Minecraft's son.

He is his father's son, and his father is good and kind and loving. But he is his mother's son, too, and she was not born the Queen she is now. Both of his parents made themselves greater. What kind of man would Wilbur be if he was simply content to wait around for a crown to be handed to him?

And if he has to take it from atop another's head, so be it. Phil wouldn't understand, nor would Technoblade. Both are content with what they have; but Wilbur wants *more*. Wilbur thought for nearly his entire life that there would be no one in this entire realm that would understand that driving *need* to be more, achieve more, *take* more.

And then Wilbur meets Quackity and he understands what it must have been like for his mother, all-powerful and near omnipotent within her realm, to fall for a simple mortal.

When Wilbur meets Quackity, he is introduced as the fiance of Eret, one of Wilbur's co-conspirators in taking down the Kinoko throne. He is...interesting. Wilbur would say beautiful, except that the danger practically smacks him in a way that seems to totally bypass Eret's observation.

There's a spark between the two of them instantly. Wilbur can't take his eyes off him the whole meeting. When Quackity glances his way as he stands at Eret's side, Wilbur makes sure to catch his eye every time. He's here to change the governmental body of a nation, not steal a political rival's lover - but, at the same time, Wilbur wouldn't say no if the opportunity presents itself.

Quackity is willing to play the word games Wilbur wants to play; he snarks with him, first in their secret meetings and then on the council floor during the election; he matches Wilbur's wit blow for blow and sometimes wins. But he also goes simpering back to Schlatt at even a glance his way, as if there's an invisible leash around his neck that he only occasionally tugs against.

Wilbur has always had a weakness for wild things in need of help. Quackity is as wounded as Technoblade, as starved as Tommy, as stuck as Tubbo and Ranboo, but Quackity doesn't *want* his help. Wilbur knows that if he offered a hand, Quackity would spit on it and then right in Wilbur's face, too.

Wilbur likes that about Quackity. He likes that Big Q has made his bed and he's willing to not only lie in it, but die in it to reach for more.

What Wilbur doesn't like, though, is that Quackity is always just out of *his* reach.

First, it's Eret. Then it's the coup. Then it's Schlatt - *fucking* Schlatt. Eret again. The election. Every time Wilbur thinks he has a chance, someone or something else dances between them and Wilbur is left alone on the dance floor, hand held out for a man looking in the opposite direction.

It's because of this that, when Quackity starts sniffing around Wilbur's family, Wilbur knows something is up. It starts small, with Quackity taking Tubbo under his wing when Schlatt starts to pay attention to the three younger boys running around the castle. Wilbur likes it, but he's no fool and the suspicion is immediate. When Quackity starts to cozy up to Technoblade, Wilbur can admit that the jealousy he feels is a touch...all-consuming.

It isn't Technoblade's fault that Quackity's master thinks he's a bigger threat than Wilbur, but it not only smarts Wilbur's pride that that truth exists; it *hurts* him. Quackity knows that Wilbur cares for him, and would take him in. He knows that he'd be safe within Wilbur's circle, in his family. He'd have *Philza Minecraft* at his back if he would just admit that they shared a connection. Hell, if he just asked Wilbur for help at all.

Instead, Quackity grows close to Wilbur's family so he can try to honeypot Wilbur's fucking brother, and Wilbur *hates* that. He hates it, and he hates Quackity for it, and he maybe hates Technoblade a little bit for it, too, but he hates Schlatt for it most of all. Because if Schlatt could just use his stupid, small little brain to realize that Wilbur is a bigger threat than anyone else, he would have sent Quackity to *Wilbur* and Wilbur could have rescued him. He could have gotten him out of all this, made him *happy*. He could have saved him.

Wilbur can't save someone who doesn't want it, though. When Technoblade inevitably rejects Quackity, Wilbur hopes that it means that Quackity will finally realize that he just has to look over. He just has to look over and see that Wilbur is waiting and willing to protect him.

Instead, Quackity disappears for three days. Wilbur is used to seeing him for hours a day, in court or around the castle but the days after Techno finally puts a stop to the farce, Quackity just *disappears*. When Wilbur next sees him, he's - different. His spark is gone. He doesn't argue with Schlatt or *anyone* like he used to, not even Wilbur. Not even jokingly with the kids. His eyes are dull, his face drawn. He holds himself stiff and away from others. When he hears Technoblade, he leaves the room before Wilbur's brother can even appear. There is something irreversibly changed about Quackity after Technoblade rejects him and Wilbur wonders if he'd been wrong. If Quackity really had been in love with his brother.

It's that thought that finally pushes Wilbur over the edge when he loses the election.

That night he attempts to take the throne. Eret was weak. She couldn't handle the throne. She couldn't handle Schlatt and Quackity's manipulation, or the pressure of the magic that Wilbur feels every time he steps into the throne room.

But Wilbur could. Wilbur *can*. He'll prove to them all; Phil and Techno, Schlatt and Quackity, the rest of the council and the knights and *everyone*, he'll prove that he's not only good enough, but that he deserves to sit on that stupid, ugly chair. Maybe it's magic comes from the Nether, but Wilbur is *Prince of the Other Side*. The power of the End runs through his veins. Unless this throne belongs to the Empress of the Nether herself, he outranks whoever fucking powers it, no matter their court alignment.

Sitting on the throne is - indescribable. Wilbur has no words; will never have words.

He loses Tommy. He knows he loses Tommy. He knows it in every shaking breath he takes, which echo out into a suddenly-too-empty throne room because a second ago Tommy had been shouting, arguing, loud enough to fill the castle and then some, and now he's just - he's just gone.

Trapped on the throne, Wilbur is, for the first time, deeply, intensely aware that for all that his heritage is divine, he is distinctly *not* yet. Mortality taints him, the gift-curse from his father just as his divinity is his mother's. Perhaps one day he will be strong enough to face this mystery Vex and win, but he is not yet.

It's only by the grace of *something* that *is* that he gets Tommy back, returned to him a bit crispy but otherwise unharmed.

It's the realisation that he is decades from ever being able to stand up to the throne's power that shatters all his plans at his feet; sharp glass, deluded and murky just as his aspirations were. Madness, his brother will call it later. He knows it was really his own ambition, burning him alive from the inside. A need to impress and show that he could earn his heritage.

Holding Tommy in his arms, the both of them crying and shaking and unable to grasp the truth of what had just transpired as it fades from their minds, too transcendent for them to contain in their memories, Wilbur becomes distinctly aware that he is in over his fucking head.

When he leaves, he runs into Quackity outside of the throne room.

"You can't let him sit on that throne." Wilbur says and he means it more than he's meant anything in his entire life. He wants to take Quackity alongside Tommy and just - run. He knows his father must have felt the shift, the change of whatever just happened and will be worried. He also knows that Quackity won't come, so he leaves him and takes Tommy.

He can't tell Phil anything about what happened. He wants to, but he *can't*. It's truly gone from him by the time he reaches his family. All he can do is say "I'm so sorry."

"Let's get you to bed." Technoblade says, comforting in the way only he can be, and Wilbur goes.

Quackity disappears.

This is not like his previous disappearance. This feels permanent. Schlatt sneers at him when he inquires after him and there are rumors around the castle that he ran. That Schlatt finally pushed too far, hit too hard, played the wrong hand, and his little birdy flew away when his back was turned and the cage door was open.

Wilbur tries not to think about it. He has more important things to ponder; the revolution, Schlatt, keeping his brothers safe from Schlatt's ire, his disappointed dad and twin. Hunting down George. Wilbur does feel bad about that, but it has to be done. To get Schlatt out of power and, hopefully, put an end to the throne and whatever Vex is powering it.

He isn't sure what to think, anyway. If Quackity had reason to flee, why hadn't it been to Wilbur? Why hadn't he come directly to Phil if he was ready to leave? Was it because he was still hung up on Techno?

Had their secret looks, the subtle brushing of fingers, their verbal spars meant nothing at all to him or was he running from Wilbur as well as Schlatt?

Did it matter, in the end?

Wilbur tries not to think about it.

Instead, he takes action. He has to redeem himself. He and his brothers hunt while Techno and Phil stay behind; he doesn't ask permission, he just goes and Tommy and Tubbo and Ranboo follow. The night Tommy was returned to him, a connection was forged between Wilbur and whatever it was that saved them both from the throne. The touch of the opposing court of the Inbetween makes him feel ill, the magic of the Nether calling to its source, and Wilbur follows, if only to purge it from himself. He can't bring himself to pray to his mother, to hear her disappointment, perhaps her disgust at his weakness. He hopes that if he somehow *fixes* this, he will be able to look her crows in the face again.

Wilbur just *knows* that if he follows his instincts, he'll find who they're looking for. He can fix this.

Wilbur is right. They find George and Sapnap, traveling with two people Wilbur doesn't recognize - one is unconscious and being carried under cover, the other is an unfamiliar man. And, they come to find out, there is a fifth companion in the form of a demigod. Wilbur feels Nether wisping from the demigod's pores like sulfur. It feels like the throne.

Wilbur tries but, still, he is not strong enough.

It is only when Technoblade finally joins them, Schlatt's insanity pushing Phil to send Techno to aid them, that Wilbur finds Quackity again.

Just out of reach, as always.

Phil cannot participate in the revolution, but he watches and protects those that are his to protect, and is proud when they are victorious.

He is not surprised when they wake up to a princeless castle once again. He wishes he could spare his son the heartache of Quackity leaving with George, but Phil has come to understand that sparing his children pain does not always lead to the best outcomes. Perhaps this is an opportunity to learn and reflect.

Still, he pretends he doesn't see when Technoblade hugs Wilbur and Wilbur's shoulders sag when the news reaches them that George has disappeared with his knights and the librarian and the previous president's assistant.

"I know where they are." Tommy says out of the side of his mouth. "Dream owes me a duel, you know."

"Let's keep that to ourselves for a bit, shall we?" Phil tries not to smile. Kinoko has a lot of work left to do if it is to not fail as L'Manburg did. Phil thinks he's going to be spending a lot more time in this pretty little country; he doesn't want to leave Wilbur here to deal with the fallout, and he's grown fond of many of the people. Maybe they can settle here, for a time. Visiting the wayward ex-prince and his entourage can wait. Give Wilbur's heart some time to truly heal first.

"Fine. But I'm gonna rub it in Wil's stupid face later." Tommy decides, and Phil can't help but laugh. He hears his wife laughing, too, in the flutter of crow wings close by.

The world is vast and powerful, in ways that he no longer can be. The ones he loves and protects have come to see that for both good and bad. He hopes that the pain hasn't ruined the beauty for any of them, in the long run.

If it has, then the time that they all have left will heal that wound, he hopes. Either way, he will be here. It's the mortality that still remains within him that begs for the chance to keep living, just that much longer.

And by his wife's grace, he does.

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